DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 140 RC 021 609

AUTHOR Munns, Geoff
TITLE "Let 'em Be King Pin Out There All on Their Own in the Streets." How Some Koori Boys Responded to Their School and Classroom.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Problems; Cultural Differences; *Cultural Influences; Elementary Secondary Education; Foreign Countries; *Indigenous Populations; Inner City; *Resistance (Psychology); School Attitudes; School Community Relationship; Student Attitudes; *Student Behavior; Student Motivation; *Student School Relationship; Values
IDENTIFIERS Australia (New South Wales); *Koori People

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the production, nature, and consequences of oppositional behavior among 102 poor, inner-city Koori (Aboriginal Australian) boys and girls attending Greytown School, Australia. The connection between the local indigenous Australian community's history and culture and the classroom life of its primary school illustrates the workings of cultural production. The majority of Koori male and female students exhibited oppositional stances in two categories: subtle and passive work avoidance such as copying from others, sharing work, or off-task behavior, and more open resistance such as classroom disruption, work refusal, and truancy. This resistance was established as early as the first year of schooling and persisted through the senior classes in spite of teaching style or discipline. High resistance was correlated with low academic achievement. Inner-city community factors contributing to oppositional behavior include poverty, alcoholism, drugs, family stress, poor health, and crime. Another contributing factor is the indigenous concept of shame, or losing face. Students could be shamed by not knowing answers, being wrong when questioned, or not being able to cope with classroom assignments. No shame was associated with quitting school. Case studies present typical crisis situations in which oppositional behavior created clashes between students and staff. There was little evidence differentiating the behavior of males and females, but the consequences of a final rejection of schooling did have gender implications. Conclusions show that students' responses to their schooling and education were collective social and cultural processes profoundly influenced by intersecting issues of context, ethnicity, social position, and gender. (Contains 17 references.) (SAS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 422 140

"Let 'em be king pin out there all on their own in the streets." How Some Koori Boys Responded to their School and Classroom.

Paper presented as part of the symposium, *Boys and Schooling: Shifting Frames and Masculinities.* Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April, 1998.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Geoff Munns
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
1

Geoff Munns
University of Western Sydney, Macarthur
Box 555 Campbelltown 2560
612 97729449
g.munns@uws.edu.au

RC 021609

Geoff Munns
University of Western Sydney Macarthur

"Let 'em be king pin out there all on their own in the streets." How Some Koori Boys Responded to their School and Classroom.

Abstract

In inner city Greytown (Australia), being indigenous and living in relative poverty are significant community factors which interact with the local primary school. The school is characterised by both very low educational outcomes and strong student opposition, particularly among its Koori (Indigenous Australian) students who constitute over 50% of the school population. Drawing on Willis's (1977, 1981, 1983) theory of resistance and cultural production, this study explores the way in which the Koori boys' oppositional responses to education reflected themes generated in the local and wider Australian community. It was found in the study that effects of gender seemed often to be modified by more dominant cultural themes produced in the community, and that process seemed to lessen the distinctions between boys' and girls' oppositional responses. However, research evidence confirmed that although patterns of oppositional behaviour appeared similar for boys and girls in the early years of schooling, the consequences of a final rejection of schooling in later years had significant gender implications. This paper discusses the production, nature and consequences of oppositional behaviour among the Koori boys who attended Greytown School.

"Let 'em be king pin out there all on their own in the streets."
How Some Koori Boys Responded to their School and Classroom.

Introduction

> Teachers have got to understand the problem that the Koori people are going through.
> *It's not just a school problem?*
> It's on a whole ... but unfortunately it's rubbin, it's carryin into the school.
> *They can't separate school from what's happened out there?*
> No they can't.

This observation from a Koori[1] parent and school worker living in inner city Greytown (Australia) points to the connection between the local indigenous Australian community's history and culture and the classroom life of its primary school. In this connection there is an illustration of the workings of *cultural production* (Willis, 1977, 1981, 1983), a concept, which when applied to the Greytown Koori students, showed how they imported and drew on community themes as they responded to their school and classrooms. Willis had first proposed the concept of cultural production in seminal research (1977) that described responses to school by working class "lads" who resisted the dominant social values and meanings of society by resisting the form of education which their local school offered. The key features of Willis's notion of cultural production are a consciousness of social position, which bring forward creative culturally produced responses generated from the local milieu, but, which reflect wider relationships in society.

The larger study[2] (see Munns, 1996a, 1996b) from which this paper is drawn utilised Willis's (1977, 1981, 1983) ideas of *resistance* and cultural production to describe how the struggle against the "system" (law, justice, education) which constituted the daily lives of most Greytown Koories impacted on the classroom curriculum that was culturally produced in the relationship between the Koori students and their teachers. It was argued in this study, that given this constant battle between Indigenous Australian people and the wider Australian society, and the way education had worked to exclude and deny equality of outcomes for Indigenous Australian students[3], it seemed rational, within the theoretical framework of the research, there were likely to be common cultural oppositional responses which students would employ at school. By oppositional, it is meant a range of classroom behaviours which seemed to work against teachers' intentions. Data from the Greytown study showed oppositional behaviour was influenced by the historically based community fear that Koori students would not succeed. The research proposed that the oppositional behaviours

---

[1] "Koori" and "Koories" are the names Indigenous Australian people use for most indigenous people from New South Wales. Henceforth these terms will be used when describing indigenous Australian students in the paper. "Indigenous Australians", "Aborigines" and "Aboriginal" will be used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a broader sense.

[2] This was an ethnographic study conducted while I was Principal of Greytown School. Data was mainly collected by observation and interviews with teachers and community members.

[3] See, among others, Harris, 1978, Malin, 1994, Commonwealth of Australia, 1995, and Partington, 1998, for a discussion of the history of indigenous Australians and schooling in Australia.

RC021609

were not light hearted. Rather, classroom responses reflected, in a serious way, the Koori students' understanding of their position in Australian society. The intent of the study was to understand the classroom responses of the Koori students as culturally appropriate strategies rather than to see them as culpable individual acts of misbehaviour.

This paper explores how Koori boys and girls at Greytown School responded to their teachers and the classrooms, highlighting similarities and differences in the nature and consequences of their responses.

Koori Students at Greytown School

Greytown School was characterised by strong student opposition and low academic standard among many of its Koori students. Common oppositional stances could be broadly categorised in two ways. First, there was subtle and passive work avoidance, which included survival strategies such as copying from others, sharing work, or being involved in quiet, non-confrontational but essentially off-task work. Second, there were the more active and dramatic stances of work rejection which ranged from classroom disruption and work refusal to truancy. Both these types of oppositional stances were adopted in varying degrees by the majority of Koori students at the school. Adopting one or other of these stances did not necessarily correlate with how old the students were, and there did not appear to be an automatic progression by individual students from passive to more active forms of opposition. However, there seemed to be an inevitability to significant numbers of Koori students making a future final rejection of school and education.

Patterns of opposition were established as early as Kindergarten (first year of school) and continued throughout primary school. Data from observations in all classes and from interviews with the whole teaching and support staff[4] highlighted the nature of the relationships between students and their classroom and curriculum. It turned out that student opposition, particularly by Koori students, was perceived as a very real factor in all classrooms, and it occurred regardless of the teaching style or the disciplinary prowess of the teacher or the type of classroom work. Table 1 summarises data obtained across the whole school. It indicates that twenty nine percent of students in the school were categorised by their teachers as offering most opposition. More important are the figures showing the correlation between high opposition and low academic standard. Of the 55 students who were said to be most opposed to the curriculum, 38 or 69% were also assessed as being of low academic standard. Thus these figures show that, according to their teachers, 20% of students in the school were both low achieving, highly oppositional students. In this group, the overwhelming majority (92%) were Koori students. It must be pointed out that when students were categorised as highly oppositional it signified the force and outcome of their opposition. That is, students could strongly oppose and avoid work either actively or passively, and the result would be the same as far as the teachers achieving their aims of getting students to complete assigned classroom tasks was concerned.

[4] The staff was made up of indigenous Australian and non-indigenous Australian teachers and support workers.

Table 1 High Opposition/Low Academic Standard

Offering Most Opposition	High Opposition / Low Academic Standard	High Opposition / Low Academic Standard Koories
55 (29% of school)	38 (20% of school, 69% of category)	35 (15 girls 20 boys) (18.5% of school, 92% of previous category)

Table 2 shows comparisons between male and female Koori students, indicating that student opposition among the Koori group was not confined to the boys. Of the 102 Koori students in the school, 53 were girls and 49 were boys. Forty six Koori students were categorised as highly oppositional, with equal numbers of girls and boys. In the low academic standard category, there were 46 Koori students. Twenty of these were girls and twenty six were boys.

Table 2 Gender, Opposition, Academic Standard

Koories (N=102)	High Opposition (N=46)	Low Academic Standard (N=46)
53 girls	23 girls	20 girls
49 boys	23 boys	26 boys

Data summarised in these tables presents a very clear picture of a school in which opposition by a large number of predominantly low achieving Koori students was a major classroom concern. The study revealed that low achieving, highly oppositional students occupied most of the teachers' time and energy. It was clear from interviews that when teachers referred to oppositional students, the students were Koories, both boys and girls. For example, the Kindergarten teacher observed that while the Asian students would sit and listen, the Koori students "get distracted easily." She also mentioned that the "rough" children were mainly Koori. These comments were consistent across the infants classes (Kindergarten, First and Second Class). The Year 1 teacher commented that teacher time was taken up with the Koori students who were needing more attention because of their general low standard and oppositional behaviour: "It wouldn't be exceptional to focus on the Aboriginal kids more so than the others". Similarly, a Year 2 teacher noted that the Koories in Year 2 were falling behind in their work and providing most classroom opposition. It was the same in all the primary classes (Third to Sixth Class), with low achieving Koori boy and girl students exerting most classroom pressure. In Year 6 the teacher noted that she found all the Koori students were the hardest group to teach.

Support staff were able to identify this pattern right through to the senior classes. Comparisons with other ethnic groups showed major differences in attitudes to work. A reading difficulties teacher observed that in the older classes the students who were reluctant to do any work were almost exclusively Koories. Similarly, the ESL[5] teacher

[5] English As A Second Language Teachers (ESL) assist students from non English speaking backgrounds.

found the Koori students would do much less than NESB students in class and were seen to be the major school discipline problems:

> I find with the kids in my reading group, now they're 5th and 6th class kids and I've got Koori kids and ESL kids. Now the ESL kids provide no problem. They'll sit down when I tell them to sit down, they don't like to rock the boat. We're doing reading, no one says, "Oh no we're not doing reading or whatever." So with the Koori kids it is a bit harder. They'll come in and they'll want to talk about what's happened in the playground at recess and it takes a while for them [Koori students] to settle down.
> *They [teachers] would be more confident of the Asian kids getting through?*
> Yeah, because they're all quiet and they do the right thing. They've got their head down and working, that's the sign of a conscientious worker. They're doing all their work.
> *What's the contrast with the Koori kids?*
> They're louder, the major discipline problems at our school at the moment are all Koori kids, all the kids who go on our support desks[6], all kids on detention.

All Koori Kids?

Taken at this level of analysis, the research data would suggest that there were no discernible gender differences in the Koori students' responses to schooling. Indeed, the general picture which emerged from the study was that no distinctly different pattern appeared between Koori boys and girls in any ages or school years. As mentioned above, both boys and girls commonly adopted oppositional stances to their classroom curriculum. Later in this paper it will be argued that this is the case because in this context, dominant cultural themes seemed to override gender effects. However, while a consideration of this phenomenon offers valuable insights into the unique nature of the relationships between all Koori students and schooling, a closer examination of the data reveals that there were times and locations when the Greytown Koori boys responded in different ways to the Koori girls. These subtly different responses were typically associated with the more aggressive types of oppositional stances. A discussion of these with reference to both boys and girls follows.

Kingpin on the Streets: Life in "The Centre"

It would be a simplification of the Greytown context to propose that it was only the Koori boys who typically exhibited the most aggressive and violent behaviour at the school, the kind stereotypically associated with masculine toughness. It would also be unfair to depict Greytown School as a place that was always rough and disorderly. The school had built up a well-deserved reputation for making its difficult context work. That is, the school had been successful in encouraging greater acceptance among the Koori students. Nevertheless, it was a tough school for teachers and students alike, with the pervasive student opposition regularly punctuated with serious, dramatic incidents which added to the daily intensity (see later comments on

[6] Children were sent to a desk in another class for discipline reasons. This was called a "support desk".

regular school crises). Teachers facing a Greytown classroom for the first time inevitably confronted a group of students who were experienced in the battle against school and wider hostile forces. As well as fighting the daily battles associated with being an indigenous Australian, Koori children in Greytown also had to grapple with attendant conditions of living in poverty[7] (Connell *et al.*, 1991:37).

Much of Greytown's reputation as a very tough suburb focused on a square of four streets which are owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company. People who know the area call this "The Centre". Despite many positive aspects to community life, The Centre stood out as the poorest area in the suburb, and despite the work which was being done to rehabilitate the community through education and employment projects, it was an area where alcoholism was a constant presence, and heroin was readily available[8]. The street influence was seen by many local Koories who were interviewed as a real factor in tempting some Koori children to move into a life away from school and into crime. With this regard the boys seemed greatest at risk. Consider the following comments in which the conspicuous "kids" who are drifting from school and into trouble are boys:

> I've seen a lot of kids that ain't (getting through the system) that are being talked about a lot and are in almost everyone's conversation and those kids are the ones that aren't at school. So the other kids see it as either trendy or the role model is sort of twisted so a lot of the younger kids want to follow those kids because they are getting attention. A lot of the good kids, not all kids are bad, but a lot of the kids that have not been going to school enough are starting to see, are influenced by that.

Bag snatching and car stealing were common, giving notoriety to The Centre. Though not all Koori children lived there, they all visited often, as it was a place where Indigenous Australian people regularly congregated. For an outsider, a visit to The Centre could be a daunting encounter, especially the first time. Note how this research diary excerpt captures the feeling of life in The Centre, truanting boys out there on the streets.

> Wednesday afternoon (school time) - The Centre - kids, touch football in the street, taking it up between cars, bottles and dogs. A kaleidoscope, surreal, sad, sometimes uplifting.

Parents readily acknowledged the pull of the streets and the likely consequences of Koori boys dropping out of school. Many hoped that their children would be happy at

---

[7] Greytown School every year was considered to be serving the most disadvantaged area in the region. This was based on statistical evidence through Commonwealth Census and through school surveys. Connell et al. (1991)show the key aspects of living in poverty, among which are: low income, shortage of educational resources, socially/physically damaging environments, correlating with transience, family stress, official surveillance (e.g. via juvenile justice), poor health. All of these applied to Greytown.

[8] There is much more to The Centre than what I describe here. There are many strong, caring families and outstanding community projects. These are surface impressions of the kind often sensationalised by sections of the media.

school (regardless of educational outcomes) and so withstand the street pressures. In the following conversation a former street kid talks this feeling from his own experiences:

> Even if the kid's at school and he is not achieving a lot but he is still at school that is seen as a good thing. Because out on the streets he would be chewed up by that system, by that cycle. It's easier, it is easier for sure and it is the cool thing. I fell into that cycle when I was little. I dropped out and never learnt really much. And my mates were getting into trouble and talkin about all the money that they were getting and they were driving around stolen cars. I ended up goin with the flow. You look down the track now and all the lads that stayed at school have gone into very good positions. They are positions of power, positions with a long term future, and those that dropped out? Some of us just managed to make it, but the others ... most of them are in the big house.

Shame, School and the Streets

While it was seen that the streets had a significant influence on school rejection for an alarming number of Greytown Koori students, in particular the boys, factors at school were also identified in the research as important elements of the resistance equation. Perhaps one of the most crucial factors was related to the indigenous Australian concept of *shame*[9]. It became apparent from discussions of school experiences with members of the Greytown Koori community that many responses to school were aimed at lessening or avoiding shame. Shame signified that the students had lost face, especially when compared with their non-Koori classmates. Students could be shamed by not knowing answers, being wrong when questioned or not seeming to be able to cope with the assigned classroom tasks. Even those students who were better able to cope, often avoided work so as not to be a "big noter" which might bring shame on others in the group who were not finding their school work so easy to complete. Group solidarity was often chosen above individual advancement. Whereas both Koori girls and boys adopted strategies to avoid shame, among many of the boys the previously discussed street factors came strongly into play. The effect of this was that there was an "either-or" choice between being shamed or running the streets. It came as no great surprise then that rejection seemed to be the obvious choice for many of the Koori students who were struggling academically. There was no shame associated with quitting school, but absolute shame in not being able to read in the classroom. This particularly applied to the older students who were being influenced by outside factors, as a Year 6 teacher noted:

> *Even your drop outs, there was less shame in dropping out than sitting in your room.*
> Yeah, sure, there was no shame running the streets or climbing over our roofs. It was a straight forward choice. Even those kids knew that what they were doing was probably not good for them. You'd talk to them, I remember one afternoon we talked to them, and they said, "Yeah we should work at school

[9] For a more detailed discussion of *shame* from this research , see Munns, in press.

> because that will give us a better opportunity later on." But the next day they were walking the streets and they were over the fence.

The teacher was referring here to a group of boys who I labelled "the street kids". These boys during the research period were on shaky educational ground, and illustrated the nexus between classroom shame and resistance. On the streets they had already been involved in criminal activities and it was curious that they still maintained some tenuous attachment to their school. At school their oppositional behaviour was not a personal thing, directed at the school, their classroom or the teacher: they were resisting education. Their exchanges with school staff were usually polite. But completely lacking in academic skills and opting for glory on the streets in preference to shame in a school lesson, they were almost impossible to get into a classroom. The following observation captures both their way of operating and how school frustrations often led to exasperated responses.

> The street kids: polite arrival at 12 noon: "I don't want to go to class now."
> My only exasperated response: "Piss off to the streets!"

One of the school's indigenous Australian teachers was able to empathise with students making the choice to reject school if they were not doing well and being shamed:

> I think that if someone came up to the Koori kid and said, "You can't read or write," and that kid was shamed about it, I think it would be easy for that kid to say, "Well the system didn't accommodate me." So it's easy to say that and then go along your other line, living on the street or following another pathway of life. It's much easier for the kids to say that, and I don't blame them, I'd say the same.

As another indigenous Australian teacher put it, when you're "being tough out in the community, you've got your self esteem out there, you're somebody." She said the parents then

> take the attitude of, well, "Me kid can't read, he can't add up, so it's the teacher's fault, so I'm not going to send him to school. Let him run around The Centre if he wants to. Let them be king pin out there all on their own in the streets." There's not as much shame in that, different from a Whitefella not turning up at school.

Crises and Suspension

With such an interplay of school and external factors working on Koori students it was not surprising that at times the constant oppositional behaviour bubbled over into more serious clashes between staff and students. Crises were usually breaches of discipline which took longer than usually to deal with, and invariably some time for the school to recover from. Both Koori boys and girls were involved in these crises during the research period, although the boys were embroiled more frequently and

more aggressively. Compare the following typical crisis situations recorded in the research diary.

> This day in the end belonged to Ben who went berserk at lunch time. He charged into the office just at the end wanting to punch a kid and would not be pacified. When I got to the office he was screaming and kicking doors. A teacher was stopping him from going into the office. When he saw me he went out, enraged, kicking more doors. We got his cousin to ring his grandmother and I talked to her. We decided that he had to be brought home. He was now over the road behind cars. The Aboriginal Education Assistant (AEA) and I approached him but he was not going to go. His cousin tried to help but that was no use. I asked a teacher to drive the AEA down The Centre to get Ben's uncle who could control him. Ben went and stood in the middle of the road. Cars came close to him. Some stopped. I had to intervene and dragged him screaming off the road. He returned and *sat* in the middle of the road. An Aboriginal woman had come running and I thought she might have been able to do something. I had asked a teacher's aide to stay meanwhile (she had been at her car) in case something had happened to him and I would be blamed. The three of us spent a hectic and totally bizarre fifteen minutes trying to stop him from going on the road. To our utter relief the teacher returned with his uncle in the car. By this time Ben had raced to the flats opposite. The uncle went looking for him. Ben had returned and was sitting in the toilets down the bottom, sobbing. Another aunty had come in. I left them to talk to Ben. Five minutes later his uncle brought Ben to the office, made him apologise and they went. We sat on the front step and got our breath back.

> Nicky Walker played up - it was her turn! I first found out when the Assistant Principal told me she had refused to come to his room after being sent by her teacher for being rude and not doing her work. She had skipped from the Assistant Principal's class and taken herself to another room. I went with the AEA and found her outside this room We told her she had to go back to Gary's room and she started to come, but very reluctantly. At the top of the stairs I attempted some warmth by touching her on the shoulder. "Don't touch me ya dope!" Not unexpected, but never easy to take. It was not my fault but it had quickly dropped into a them versus us thing. She walked the rest of the way to the Assistant Principal's room with her hands over her ears. Common. She stopped outside his room and wouldn't go in. I thought that might be a matter of time. However she waited a while out there and then went to the sand pit. The AEA and I decided to go down to see her mum down The Centre. Nicky would not come with us so we went. Down The Centre things were pretty much as usual. Street life was evident. We went down to their house but her mum was not there. "Playin cards, maybe." Went through their house to the back lane. Some youths were drinking beer out there. We walked around with Debbie asking, "Ay, seen Becky?" No luck. On the way back to school we passed Nicky in the main street. She had all her school things with her. I told the AEA not to say anything and we passed in silence - Nicky with a look which said anger, defiance, sadness.

With the Koori boys more likely to be involved in the more dramatic and aggressive incidents, they were more regularly suspended than the Koori girls. Suspension was a constant divisive issue at Greytown. It was used as a last resort tactic, despite being a contradictory "solution" to the school's ethos and discipline policy. As mentioned previously, oppositional behaviour often quickly escalated to an offence which would seem to warrant suspension. Some students, and usually the boys, chose disruptive and aggressive behaviour as a classroom defence mechanism to avoid shame. Ironically, suspension was then used with students who did not want to be at school, as this diary entry observes:

> Massive blow up with Joey on Friday - kicking, hitting, punching, throwing books, threatening to throw a heavy object at me. I gave him two days' suspension. What could I do? It came on the day when I had been arguing (with some staff members) for his right to be at school - (his actions were) almost as if he were supplying an eloquent argument for them (those demanding his suspension)! Afterwards I was destroyed, blown away. Do you suspend a kid who doesn't want to come to school?

A comparatively much smaller number of Koori girls was suspended during the research period. This was because their opposition did not usually escalate to the same physical heights as the boys. Nevertheless their resistance to education, their strength of resolve, was arguably every bit as strong:

> Michelle sent from her (Year 5) class. Michelle worked outside my office and she was surly, tough, confrontational. I tried to talk to her after school but got no response. She was giving me the silent treatment and I tried to outlast her. Having decided to defer till tomorrow at 9.00 am, I only needed an answer from her before she went. She defied it, waiting - the 5th *Greytown standoff* of the week.
> She eventually went giving the two word answer, sullenly: "Yes sir."
> I said, "OK, see ya Michelle."
> "I'm not sayin goodbye to you!"
> One of our best kids.

Greytown Koories: Blurred Gender Distinctions

The data from the Greytown research indicated that there were critical points to be considered about both gender influences and consequences for the Koori students. To recapitulate, with some exception (discussed above) the data indicated that in the general oppositional behaviour of the Koori students there were many similarities in the responses of boys and girls. Both groups were said to oppose the curriculum in active and passive ways and in relatively equal numbers. Observations also showed that girls were involved in serious breaches of discipline, even though their responses were not as dramatic as those of the boys during the observation period.

The issue of the lack of significant differences in the oppositional behaviour of Koori girls and boys seems to be contrary to the findings in the literature, where research shows that girls are likely to respond differently because they inhabit a structurally

different position to that inhabited by boys (see, for example, McRobbie, 1978, Jones, 1989). There are two possible explanations of this phenomenon at Greytown School. The first is to do with the nature of the relationship between Aboriginal people and Australian society and education. It was evident from the data that the fears of school failure and related and subsequent low expectations among Koori community members significantly influenced the Koori students' classroom responses. Koori students were not expected to succeed at school, and this low expectation applied to both boys and girls. In this sense it may be argued that the effects of gender were modified by more dominant cultural themes (see a discussion of this notion in Hatton and O'Brien, 1995). That is, all Koori people were battling the system. Second, data illustrated how Koori parents trained their children to be tough and resilient so they could survive a system characterised by their continued subjection to racism and oppression. These findings agreed with Malin's (1990) research. The data from both this and Malin's study indicated that Aboriginal parents trained both boys and girls to be able to withstand future racist treatment. A former Greytown street kid admitted in an interview that he was rebellious at school and told by his father "if the teacher shames you up, then just come home." Likewise a Greytown mother told how she trained her children to react when faced with the injustices of the system:

> Maybe I'm wrong I've taught my kids to never take a backward step. If any body said the wrong thing they either have to put up or shut up. I've always found that the best defence was attack. Walk out. Say: "Fuck you Jack!"
> *And a lot of Aboriginal people are giving the same message that the kids have to be tougher?*
> They have to be tough to fight the system.

It is quite possible that this training was implicated in the development of a different version of femininity among Koori girls. Other social groups who do not face the same oppression may have different expectations, and consequently different training for boys and girls. Often this seems to encourage the boys to adopt more aggressive behaviours. On the other hand, the data from the Greytown study indicated that the Koori girls were just as likely to refuse work as persistently as the Koori boys, but perhaps not as aggressively in a direct confrontational sense. Hatton and O'Brien (1995) proposed that this was also the case in a poor school they studied. They suggested that at this school there were Aboriginal and non Aboriginal versions of femininity, and the Aboriginal version more closely resembled the stereotype of male oppositional behaviour:

> It seems overall patterns of behaviour of Aboriginal female offenders compared to those of non Aboriginal offenders may be less influenced by implicit demands for passivity and conformity. Indeed, there are considerable similarities in the Aboriginal version of femininity to patterns of behaviour which are stereotypically male (Hatton and O'Brien, 1995).

However, evidence from Greytown confirms that although patterns of oppositional behaviour appeared similar in the early years of schooling, the consequences of a final rejection of schooling would have gender implications. As McFadden (1995:297) puts it, "resistance has differential racial, ethnic and gender consequences." Thus, selection

of available options after school has been rejected seemed to be influenced by how Koori boys and Koori girls differently understood their different structural positions. Often the selection of options proved damaging for individuals and the community. The post school situation of Greytown Koories should not be generalised, exaggerated or dramatised. Not all fell into trouble, and many sooner or later were able to gain employment or entry to alternative training and education. Tragically, however, many Koori boys who left school early became involved in crimes like car stealing and bag snatching. Many girls faced difficulties associated with early motherhood and subsequent single parenting. Problems associated with drug and alcohol addiction were common among boys and girls in the community. Although it was mentioned above that the street influence seemed to exert a stronger pull away from school for the Koori boys, there were certainly some serious consequences for the Koori girls who opted for the streets rather than school.

Conclusion

The story of Koori boys and girls told in this research shows that the students' responses to their schooling and education were collective social and cultural processes profoundly influenced by intersecting issues of context, ethnicity, social position and gender. It is a timely reminder in times when the education of boys and girls is often viewed across a divide of male-female dualism, that at the level of context there are challenges to the ways we may understand gendered structural locations.

References

Connell, R.W., White, V.M., and Johnston, K.M. (1991) *Running Twice As Hard.* Melbourne: Deakin University.

Harris, J.W. (1978a) The education of Aboriginal children in NSW public schools since 1788, Part 1. *The Aboriginal Child at School* 6 (4), pp. 22-35.

Harris, J.W. (1978b) The education of Aboriginal children in NSW public schools since 1788, Part 2. *The Aboriginal Child at School* 6 (5), pp. 20-30.

Hatton, E. J., and O'Brien, L. (1995) Discipline Policy in a Working Class Rural Primary School: Gender and Ethnicity. Unpublished paper.

Jones, A. (1989) The Cultural Production of Classroom Practice. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 10, 1, pp. 19-31.

Malin, M. (1990) The Visibility and Invisibility of Aboriginal Students in an Urban Classroom. *Australian Journal of Education*, 34, 3, pp. 312-329.

Malin, M. (1994) Aboriginal education, policy and teaching, in Hatton, E. (Ed) *Understanding Teaching. Curriculum and the Social Context of Schooling.* Sydney: Harcourt Brace.

McFadden, M. (1995) Resistance to Schooling and Educational Outcomes: questions of structure and agency. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16, 3, pp. 293-308.

McRobbie, A (1978) Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity, *Women Take Issue*. London: Hutchinson.

Munns, G. (1996a) *Teaching Resistant Koori Students: Towards Non-Reproductive Education*, Unpublished PhD thesis. Armidale: UNE.

Munns, G. (1996b) *School As A Cubbyhouse: Koori Students, Their Teachers and the Curriculum in an Inner City Primary School*, paper presented at AARE Conference, Singapore, 1996.

Munns, G. (in press) "A Lot Of Em Get So Shamed": Koori Students, Risks, Shame and the Classroom Curriculum, *SET*.

Partington, G. (1998) "In Those Days it Was That Rough": Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History and Education, in Partington, G. (Ed) *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education*. Katoomba: Social Science Press.

Reference Group Overseeing the National Review of Education For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. (1995) *National Review of Education For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Willis, P. (1977) *Learning To Labour*. Farnborough: Saxon House.

Willis, P. (1981) Cultural Production is Different from Cultural Reproduction is Different from Social Reproduction is Different from Reproduction. *Interchange*, 12 (2-3), pp. 48-67.

Willis, P. (1983) Cultural Production and Theories of Reproduction, in: Barton, L. and Walker, S. (Eds) *Race, Class and Education*. London: Croon Helm.